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Memorial Address

on

Hon. William McKinley

Before the

Masonic Veterans

in the

Masonic Temple

New York

By Venerable Brother John Shrady, M. D.

September 30th, 1901

A MEMORIAL ADDRESS

ON

HON. WILLIAM McKINLEY

BEFORE THE

MASONIC VETERANS

IN THE

MASONIC TEMPLE

Sixth Avenue and Twenty-third Street, N. Y.

By VENERABE BROTHER JOHN SHRADY, M. D.

SEPTEMBER 30th, 1901.

But there are deeds, which shall not pass away,
And names that must not wither, though the earth
Forgets her empire with a just decay.

—Byron.

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AT 3.30 P. M., September 19th, 1901, there was an interment in a town distant from the center of population in a great republic. There was a simultaneous hush of traffic tnroughout the civilized world—bells tolled, standards drooped, sheafs of wheat were mingled with the sombre black and the royal purple,—there were garlands, cannon booms, dirges, moans, sobs and "the mist of unshed tears." There were emblems of martyrdom and glory, of love and triumph, of death and the proffered crown. An impressive scene in a great metropolis to which had come deep under the sea messages of sympathy from empires, kingdoms, sovereignties and clanships powerful somewhere in our outer world. How like Angelus in the field pausing at vespers! What a wealth of woe! Amen! and Amen! for a death meant to be sudden but made sublime! What a change from acclaims to intercessions, from shouts to requiems, from a "Hail Columbia" to the "March in Saul," from the pæans of waiting crowds to troublous visions in the breaking dawn! What now of that message of glad tidings!

In that mournful pageant, slow pacing throughout a continent can we ever forget the presence of the plain people

with their communings in secret, those humble toilers dependant upon their hopes for glimpses of a life where sorrow can never come? Nay, can we forget in the midst of that multitude the lesson of the most primitive philosophies that there can be no mountain top without the vale? Yet, all this religion of antithesis man caught from the wild woods before his interpretations of power began, before the morn of his idolatries, before history was formulated and long before his race had begun to convert by extermination. Was not the Chief Magistrate of our land one of the plain people whom Lincoln so loved for their humble worth and scorn of pomp? It was not through them that his being soared out upon the wings of the coming day. Happy indeed were they that no allegations were written against them so proud of their fervid loyalty.

On that memorable afternoon were not all men rehearsing the story of a life in the hushed companionship of a calamity while putting their shoulders together that they might show their mute sympathies more and more in unison. The chorus of gloom might have been too softly sung for it was an awakening "from a deep dream of peace" and eyes had not yet seen the angel "writing in a book of gold." Nay more, the pulse of life was still while men stood uncovered and thus exalted the American nation in human history. What a rehearsal of virtues and what a consensus of affection while awestruck souls were peering into the Beyond! But words yield but scant justice.

William McKinley, aged 58 years. An inscription which in itself is a text. It recalls a life beginning with nursery rhymes and the primer and merging into Bunyan's Pilgrim and the Holy Bible. It suggests the jocund boy loving work, for the sake of a ~~widowed~~ mother's comfort. Then come his holidays of achievement in the public schools crowned by a lofty patriotism, and then a running commentary on his worth as a soldier without vengeance or hate ; an enemy of disintegration in every guise, regarding every phase of society as a trust and breathing to the full the spirit of our progressive life ; a volunteer rather than a professional, offering the vigor of his growing manhood to his well-loved country and acquitting himself a most genial hero, as magnanimous to a foe as to a most cherished friend. Later we may study him as a lawyer recognizing his profession as for the common good and not as a device to terrorize but to persuade men. Again we may hail him as a guide for his people "in the ways they knew not," with no quiet but in activity, often with an ear to the ground that he might learn the direction of their march. Well indeed did he know the imperial West with its pioneers, rejoicing in their hard-won homes—the bleak North with its hardihood, stern but purifying and with a yearning for the perfect day—the philosophic East, wrestling with its logic and exemplifying its steady, reflective courage, while still later-on, our spirits were aglow with his experience of the sunny South which brought memories of hearty cheer and an over-flowing hospitality. How serene the moonlight of our dream !

Verily, McKinley was a born statesman, with courtesy as his most dangerous weapon, and a rare exemplar of chivalry—one whose strategy was not casuistry or deception but the exactitude of the accountant, or rather might he not be better described as one whose diplomacy was not a mere babble of words but an earnest struggle for right. As all will concede it was a habit of his temperament to ponder well upon the available means as in the case of the Spanish-American War in which the delays were before and not after the battle. In that brief ordeal Our President's tender humanity accentuated the "Golden Rule" with almost a new meaning. How well did he confront the future without breaking with the past! How ardent were his convictions of the doctrine of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. These dreams of peace indeed with him had their uses. Well was it said not so long ago, that "the hope of the world almost stifled had been renewed by an unexpected apparition!" What happiness then was ours as we trimmed from our holidays all memories of evil portent! How brightly then gleamed our faith that futile torpedoes were for dauntless seamen! How then our most blessed thoughts were of prestige, of the open door of our best ambitions and better yet of the promise of the typical manhood of the coming future when "peace and harmony" in the coming days would reign no longer only at random but for evermore.

It has been told how by a visit to a general hospital of the Civil War he was led to admire masonry. The story is

brief. There were confederate prisoners and union soldiers haphazard in rows of cots. "How is it" said McKinley, "that there are no distinctions, that all are treated alike?" They are brother Masons" was the rejoinder. "May I be one?" said the visitor, whose name has pervaded the earth and is yet making mankind akin, not by perishable idols but in the name of the Supreme ruler of the universe. This our brother who honored us by his affiliation in the bonds sanctified by willing oaths of fealty, ever remembered us. We claim him also as our own, yea, next to the widow rocking in grief; we claim him in our best memories and shall ever regard him as a paragon for imitation.

Snug within our heart of hearts we shall keep him, in common with the world not for his greatness but for his worth. Even without his masonry, to us he was "free and accepted," for we yearn to know that the good Lord placed him upon a pinnacle that the lengthened ray might the better reach us and that distance might lend enchantment. Could any career have had a higher sanctification?

Yes, my venerable brethren, we were proud to claim this man as an associate, not through pride of one who trusted in phrases rather than actions, but for the heroic example of an unsullied, and therefore, immortal name. We do not claim to pre-empt virtures but to copy them. We arrogate to ourselves no patent of nobility, we but humbly thank the great Creator for such a full rounded being as that of our countryman, our friend,

and now our departed brother. We content ourselves with the cheer of possibilities and hope to strive yet a little longer for the same conscience void of offense. Let us not forget that the small things of this world may confound the mighty. Let us not forget that man by strife may rise above his environments or that the eagle may soar above his eyrie only to enjoy a solitude. There yet abide to us perhaps too indifferent loiterers all the joys of companionship and the assurance that in the recent words of a divine we may be enriched more by what we put into the world, than by what we take out of it. Can we ever over-admire symmetry of character in a republic of virtues?

Lest we forget amid the impressive sadness, let us hold up in prayer the hands of that other brother upon whom the mantel of responsibility has fallen, let us avoid the unseemly abuse, let us "render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's," and let us be well reminded by the forewarning of David, the Singer of Israel, lest "they part my garments among them and cast lots upon my vesture."

Nay, my brethren, do we not also enjoy blessings regardless of their cost, nay, more, do not all protest against a division even of their own heritages? How many even at this very moment are regretting the omitted obeisance and are denying that they ever warred against the poor handful of dust mouldering before them! While we regard life as not a tragedy but as a privilege let us avoid such pangs so that we may be "Nearer My God to Thee." Let us search the nooks and corners of our hearts.

"God moves in a mysterious way" begins the hymn and our gifted brother has left us, with his faith unshadowed, his hope triumphant and his charity abiding to the end—with his piety unchallenged and himself even while lingering in the river almost without scorn of the serpent that crawled into his Eden and left one who quivered only by her lips. How the prayers and obligations of this model pair were ever in unison! But through the murky shadows of their pathway along the shore at last came the whispered text of "Lead Kindly Light" and echoes sadly whispered, oh! such words of comfort with bated breath! Let us draw together the curtain and hide our eyes from the tender parting. But what for the author of the vivid horror whose highest resolve was to glorify the executioneer by the enormity of the crime. Let us never by word or deed stain with blood our own hands even under the direst provocation. We never met on that level nor can we part upon such a hypothecated square. Let us not pelt with unseemly epithets, for words are elastic and may rebound; nor let us so sin that our pride must conquer repentance. Let our own dead rest, for this blest martyr's life was his God's, his country's and truth's, with an immortality gained beyond the stormy banks of Jordan. He is bearing the palm of the faithful servant in repute for the work well done and his crown is a nation's gratitude. Like him whom we now mourn, let us guard well against even the trivial sin, let us ever work after his models, for then in our deaths there can be no ignominy or execration.

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